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ABSTRACT

Women in development refers to the needs and problems of women in developing countries and the responsibility of industrialized countries to ensure that aid programs serve the best interests of these women. A concern of adult educators is the relationship between adult education and the challenges facing women in the development of their countries. In addition, men and women in the United States must be educated as to ways in which they can be of optimal assistance. Illiteracy and lack of education and training of women contribute to a vicious cycle of underdevelopment, low productivity, and poor conditions of health and welfare. Girls get less schooling than boys; adult women have some opportunities to go to literacy classes, but have difficulty finding the time and energy. Current international activity relating to literacy promotion puts pressure on governments. Some of the most effective literacy work is done by women in nongovernmental organizations. The literacy movement has progressed from its beginnings as a skill taught in nonformal situations to a phase in which learning was connected to carrying out women's responsibilities. Now women require training for productivity. One obvious training opportunity could be provided by agricultural extension workers. Education of women is also the key factor in the area of family health. The only successful way to help women is to help them work toward their own empowerment. (YLB)

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Women in Development

by

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for

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In attempting to address the subject of "Women in Development," I am immediately reminded of one of the questions on the Master's Candidancy Examination in the Adult Education Department at the University of the District of Columbia. The question is preceeded by a statement to the effect that the term "Women in Development" is an abbreviated way of referring to the needs and problems of women in developing countries, and the responsibility of women in industrialized countries to ensure that aid programs serve the best interests of Third World women. The student is requested to describe these concerns and suggest how they relate to adult education. Therefore, it would appear that, in this presentation, I will be answering my own examination question. The problem is that instead of filling a blue book, one could write a book on this subject, and, indeed many people have.

I first became aware of this subject in the early seventies. At that time, a woman in Washington named Arvonne Fraser, wife of a representative from the State of Minnesota, became concerned that all the projects being sponsored in developing countries by our Department of State were planned and implemented essentially by men in this country and for men in developing countries. To raise the consciousness of women in this country concerning this issue, she used to host brown bag lunches in her living room, when she would explain to interested women the findings from her research. In this way she interested a body of prominent women, some of whom engaged in significant research in the subject as well, and the Women in Development Movement was born. Fraser traveled and gave lectures and wrote until she and other women

were able to convince members of Congress to address this question, and in 1973, the Percy Amendment was passed which required that bilateral assistance programs

> be administered so as to give particular attention to those programs, projects and activities which tend to integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort.

Furthermore guidelines were written for the United States Agency for International Development requiring that women be employed to monitor international efforts. To this end the Women in Development section was established at USAID and provided a small budget to carry on some small experimental programs as well. Arvonne Fraser was made the first Director of this WID Office (Women in Development), as it came to be known. She was very effective in getting her message out to significant persons in this country and abroad. Eventually, the World Bank also started a parallel structure which was also small and with a small budget, but it grows little by little. Today Arvonne Fraser is the Director of a special project on "Women, Public Policy and Development" at the Humphrey Insitute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. She is dedicated to the elinimation of discrimination against women with all its pernicious effects on maternal and family health, education and social, economic and political development generally. She is respected for her work in all the international assistance bodies in the world.

In this paper, I will suggest some of the dimensions of this subject, show the crucial importance of adult education to the

betterment of women's condition in Third World countries, and, in the process, mention several organizations which are working in this area.

As you are all aware, the United Nations declared the years from 1975-1985 the Women's Decade, realizing at last that optimal development in Third World countries can never take place if the women are not included in the process. This may seem obvious to us now here, but, unfortunately, it is a kind of thinking that is only partially accepted in many places still. To initiate the Decade, a world conference for women was called for Mexico City in 1975. In 1980, the mid-decade conference was held in Denmark, and in 1985, the final conference was held at Nairobi, Kenya. Each of these conferences were preceeded by <u>regional</u> conferences where women discussed the program of the conference and the problems which <u>they</u> wished to address. It is important to point this out to dispel any idea that women from Western, industrialized countries were setting the agenda from their set of Western values. From these regional conferences, important issues for women emerged as they themselves expressed them. Some of these subjects will be discussed in this paper.

Our obvious concern is the relationship between adult education and the challenges facing women in the development of their countries. Not to be overlooked, however, is the education of men and women in our own country as to the ways we can be of optimal assistance, which basically means aiding them in their own empowerment to make the decisions best suited to their situations. This is a difficult task. As Americans, we are apt to think we know how to solve other people's problems, and

furthermore, if it is our money than we should certainly have a say in how it is spent. Beyond this, there is the question of values which is not a simple issue.

You cannot put an aid package together that is not based on values. For example, whose values are we serving if our government says we may not provide funds to organizations in other countries which advocate or provide abortions? If we did not have such a restriction, we would still be supporting a value, namely, that we believe that countries should make such decisions for themselves, and that in turn, means that we would be accepting and supporting the idea of abortion where it is allowed, even if the controversy still rages here in the United States. No action is value-free. Still, we do want to help and we cannot avoid action. Therefore, we have to make our choices, and make them in the most informed and enlightened way possible and that involves a great deal of education for adults, because we have to learn to work <u>with</u> peoples in developing countries; we have to learn how to facilitate their learning and their self-empowerment. The process may be slower than imported quick-fix solutions, but, in the end, it is the only process that will succeed.

So how do we work with women in developing countries, and how do we train ourselves to be enlightened providers? The answer is, of course, by working <u>with</u> these women, and how do we do that? The United Nations Decade for Women organization set a really good example in organizing the world conferences. They asked each country to develop its own set of concerns and as a

next step to present these to the regional conferences where they were discussed among the women from all the countries in the region. The next step was for the regional conferences to develop a list of priority issues for the world conference. The organizing committee for the world conference was made up of women representing all regions, and they, in turn, decided on the issues to be presented at the world conference. This was very much an adult education process. The women and men at these conferences educated each other and the result of their efforts in the end was the report, entitled, "Forward Looking Strategies: For the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000," which was adopted by consensus by delegates from over 150 countries in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985.

How can it not be obvious to all that illiteracy and lack of education and training of women contributes to a vicious cycle of underdevelopment, low productivity and poor conditions of health and welfare? A few statistics provided by Joyce Mujuru, Minister of Womens Affairs in Zimbabwe make the point. "Two out of three illiterates in the world are women. It is estimated that women are responsible, on their own, for the support and care of about 75 per cent of the world's children. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours and receive one-tenth of the world's income for their work. In many countries women cannot get credit and cannot own land they cultivate. In Africa, women produce roughly 75 per cent of the the food."

Since literacy is the most basic kind of education needed by women, we have to look to see what education girls get. Of course, it is different in the various countries, but there is a

general pattern that can be applied. Girls get less schooling than boys for all sorts of reasons, the most important being that mothers cannot carry on all the activities mentioned above without help. Older girls, often young children themselves, must care for the little ones. If girls do get two or three years of schooling, and never have a chance to continue learning, they revert to illiteracy within a few years. Therefore, the high rate of illiteracy among women continues and increases. Adult women do have some opportunities to go to literacy classes, usually of a non-formal sort in villages. Their problem comes in finding the time and energy, for they may have to walk some miles. Traditionally, there may have been little need for the ability to read, write and figure, but that is changing today. With the development of projects like cooperatives, persons can only participate fully if they are able to check the records, understand market conditions and make wise decisions. Women are now becoming engaged in many kinds of income-generating projects. It stands to reason that you can only go a very short way in business without literacy and numeracy skills. Who is doing what about literacy? (Insert story of woman collecting pay at a cooperative)

You are all aware of the fact that 1990 is International Literacy Year, sponsored by UNESCO, which has been in the business of promoting literacy for a couple decades, with special Literacy Day celebrations each year and with awards to countries that have made outstanding progress. Also the International Council for Adult Education has made literacy a priority in its

work throughout the world. This past January at the International Council for Adult Education's world conference in Thailand, great ceremony was organized for the opening of International Literacy year, by a task force of non-governmental organizations from many countries which are providing literacy training.

How does all this international activity actually translate into education opportunities for women? In the first place it puts pressure on governments in hopes that they will be motivated into taking action. Not so long ago, there were no statistics on the numbers of illiterates, and also what statistics there were, were not broken down in terms of gender. As countries fulfill UNESCO requirements to collect such data, they become aware of the needs they face and, even though the task of eradicating illiteracy is a monumental task, the challenge is being taken up. I say it is a monumental task because even as we are talking about this subject, the actual number of illiterates is continuing to grow for many reasons, but especially because of the population growth. For instance, Kenya started a five-year plan to eradicate illiteracy in 1978, but by 1983 they had not gained much ground, but were barely holding their own. They have one of highest the population growth rates in the world (4%).

Some of the most effective literacy work is done by women themselves in non-governmental organizations which may be community-based, regional or country-wide. Usually, literacy is taught along with other training efforts, such as income-generating projects, community health programs, and projects to train women how to get and use credit.

The literacy movement, however, has gone through many phases over the last two decades. Beginning as a more or less academic skill taught in nonformal situations, you know, adults sitting under a banana tree, scratching letters in the dirt, learning letters and simple words and sentences, the concept of literacy education has changed significantly. A more socially effective method of literacy development was the phase in which learning was connected to the carrying out of the various responsibilities of women, such as, the health of their children, their community roles and their income-generating projects. For instance, if they are raising peanuts, their study centered around specific agricultural issues, and business practices. Nevertheless, much of the accepted wisdom about literacy is being questioned by women themselves as they find that literacy, per se, does not alleviate many of their problems. As these even illiterate women become more sophisticated, they are asking the important political, economic and social questions about literacy training. They resent authoritarian-type teachers who teach letters, sounds and words, but do not help them break out of their oppression. They resent the stigma that has grown up around illiteracy due to the current media blitz and, in some cases, prefer to hide their illiteracy rather than be counted among the world's "stupid people." They resent the fact that the great oral traditions of their people seem to count for nothing when the whole world is talking about literacy. Therefore, it is obvious that literacy education has entered still another phase--the most difficult and yet most important phase of the movement.

For more specific kinds of needed training, we could look to

the case of productivity. For instance, the woman in Africa raises the food to feed the family. This is tradition. Men may do the heaviest physical chores of clearing land and herding animals, etc. but the woman is in charge of the subsistance crops and all the farmyard animals--this, in addition to her other duties of raising a large number of children, hauling water, sometimes up to five miles, gathering twigs to make a fire to boil the water for human consumption, plus caring for the health and education of her children who need school supplies and minimal uniforms. I myself have seen women in Kenya walking along a road with huge containers of water on their heads, or huge bundles of sticks on their backs while carrying a baby and with a little child walking along beside. Her traditional role has become even more burdensome as the men have left to work in the city or have gone to different parts of the country to work on cash crops. Ideally, the men would be sending money home, but this ideal often fails. They sometimes start second families where they work, and often money is squandered. How can education help this woman and where can she get it?

One obvious training opportunity should be provided by agricultural extension workers, but most often in the past this has not been the case. Extension workers have been mostly men and have seen men as their target audience, even though women produce the food. We hope this is changing now, but there are still problems. More female extension workers are needed to cover situations where men are traditionally not welcome to instruct women, especially in Moslem communities. In many

countries there is still tremendous discrimination against women studying, learning or being educated or trained, and women who try are punished in many ways. However, in situations where it is allowed, assistance can help the women improve agricultural practices in order to feed their families more adequately and to raise enough to market some produce for the cash they need for buying those things that must be purchased.

I have used agriculture as one example of why women need education. However, we all understand that the need for education undergirds every aspect of life for women in a developing country. In her review of the "Forward Looking Strategies," the Nairobi report mentioned above, Arvonne Fraser said the "importance of and the need for education, information and training is mentioned in 129 out of the 373 paragrapshs in the document. In other words, virtually one-third of all the paragraphs deal with education."

If we look at the question of family health, research shows again that education of women is the key factor. John C. Caldwell, who has spent his life studying health related issues in the Third World says that data from his own rsearch and from the World Fertility Survey indicate that maternal education has a greater impact on fertility patterns than either access to health facilities or family income, and that the families of women with formal educational experience in the village, even without a health facility, were found to have better health than those women with lower educational experience, even where there was a health facility. I would like to quote from a newsletter from the Center of Advanced Study of International Development

published at Michigan State University, which reports on a speech made by Dr. Haydee Lopez of the National Association of Chilean Physicians. She suggested that

> the training of volunteer women community health workers in Chile (with no support from the Pinochet government) has resulted in the mobilization of thousands of women in urban slums and in some rural areas. These autonomous community groups are not only successfully dealing with major health threats in their neighborhoods and regions, they are generating consciousness and increased self-sufficiency and activism among women in all aspects of their lives. Dr. Lopez maintains that if health care providers will listen to and learn from the community health workers, they will be able to design better, more appropriate and effective health care services.

and

> Illness is the result of societal problems ranging from political repression to unemployment, delinquency, drugs, alcohalism, neuroses and environmental degradation. To address women's health issues means to address all these societal problems and additonally to achieve equal rights for women within their families and their societies.

The kind of training being referred to here includes literacy, but many other practical skills for the improvement of the quality of life in the community, as well.

The problems of women in developing countries are many and complicated, and they usually stem from discrimination and lack of equal access to resources. They are political, social, economic and religious. In the foregoing we have touched briefly on women in agriculture and women and health. Other problematic areas are employment and trade and commercial service, appropriateness of new technology, housing, transport, energy and the environment. Beyond these well-recognized areas there are those of specific populations, such as drought and abuse, and trafficking and involuntary prostitution. There are refugee women who constitute

90 per cent of all refugees, and migrant women. We cannot go into the trials and tribulations of all these groups at this time.

We need to recognize that much of the aid that has been provided to developing countries over the last two decades has not alleviated many of the problems of wowen. This is partly because most attention has been paid to the education of children, even if also somewhat ineffectively, and because much of modern training has been provided to men. The cause also lies in the fact that western donors have relied too much on their own ideas of what would be good for women in the Third World. Only now is considerable attention being given to the process of making the women in the Third World partners in the development of funded projects, and only the first steps are being taken in asking local women to take part in the evaluation of projects to which they have been subjected. As I stated early on in these remarks, the only successful way to help women is to help them work towards their own empowerment, which requires great understanding, sophistication, and patience on the part of the donor who, therefore, needs much adult education.

In closing, I would like to mention the Women's Network of the International Council for Adult Education. Making every effort to bring women together from many countries to survey their situations and to work with each other to find solutions, the Women's Network is exploring the hard and slow, but sure, path of helping women to help themselves and each other. I will be very happy to make information about the Women's Network available to those who might want it.